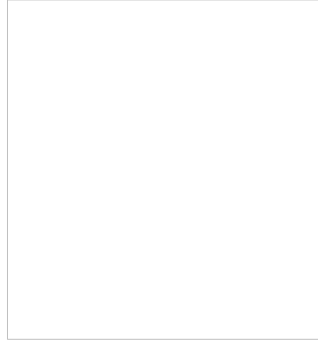


Anapanasati - Question and Answer

By the Venerable U Vimalaramsi



Question:

Hi Bhante V!

There has been quite a few questions and some confusion about relaxing on the in breath and also on the out breath. Can you put a finer point on that and perhaps explain very specifically how your awareness needs to be directed through the course of a few breaths.

Would it be helpful to use noting "relaxing". What are you being aware of exactly?

Many thanks
david

Answer:

Boy! Next time why don't you pick a deeper question? Hahaha! OK

I'll try to be as precise as possible and also it would be good to re-read the article about the practice of Breathing Meditation that I wrote and have posted a couple of times (the last time I posted it, it was to Tom).

When the Buddha gave the instructions in the Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta he said "He trains thus: 'On the in breath, I shall tranquilize the bodily formation': He trains thus: "On the out breath, I shall tranquilize the bodily formation." (This is paraphrased by me) and later in the sutta it says, "On the in breath, I shall tranquilize the mental formations. On the out breath I shall tranquilize the mental formation". The breath is used as a reminder to relax, it is not the main purpose of this meditation to only see the breath to the exclusion of everything else. Again the breath is the reminder to relax and then to be able to see how mind's attention moves away from the breath and relaxing. Now what does this mean?

In my experience I have found that there is a slightly different type of relaxing on the in breath, by this I mean that the feeling of tranquilizing the tightness or tension in one's head is not the same as the feeling when one tranquilizes the tightness or tension on the out breath. Maybe I can explain it like this there is a membrane that encloses the entire brain. Anytime mind's attention moves it causes this membrane to contract or get tighter this is commonly called "Craving" or the "I like it or I don't like it mind". This tightness is how we notice that craving is present. When one lets go of this slight tightness or tension they will feel a release of this bigger type of craving that always manifests as tension or tightness. When this tightness or tension is let go of there is a feeling of expansion or opening up that occurs and there is a very subtle relief!

Then on the out breath the feeling goes deeper. I will explain it like this physically the brain is made up of two separate lobes and each lobe also, has another membrane around each individual lobe these two separate membranes get stuck together by old attachments. As the meditator relaxes on the out breath this allows the two separate membranes to let go a very little bit. The smiling is so

important because when one is smiling it helps mind to be lighter and more alert. Also, this gives a sense of fun to the practice and this helps one to see the impersonal nature of everything that arises. This is why we stress smiling so much at this group. Joy is one of the enlightenment factors - without a sense of joyful curiosity about how mind and body occurs the practice tends to get very serious and it turns into work instead of being a fun exploration. Here is a question to ponder: Would the Buddha have become so popular if he only talked about pain and suffering? Remember > the Buddha lived and taught many different types of people. Mostly uneducated farmers and laymen, so would talk about suffering be a popular topic? Or was the cessation of the suffering what was focused on? If one develops a sense of fun and seeing how to let go of pain and suffering, would that make Buddhism more of an optimistic way of life?

Overtime as one lets go of the hindrances these membranes begin to come a part little by little. As this happens one's meditation gets deeper and more clear. Letting go of the hindrances means to see exactly how each hindrance arises on a more and more subtle level. This is where the links of Dependent Origination become more easily discernable. Without going through the whole process it works like this. In order to see (for example) there must be a good working eye and color and form. When the eye hits the color and form then eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of these three things is called eye-contact. With eye-contact as condition eye feeling arises (this feeling is pleasant, painful or neither painful nor pleasant and the feeling can be either bodily or mental) with eye-feeling as condition, eye-craving arises, with eye-craving as condition clinging arises. Now the clinging is all of the stories, concepts, opinions, ideas and the "I" identification becomes very big.

When the meditator relaxes on the in breath and on the out breath they are beginning to let go of craving. Whenever mind's attention begins to move away from the breath and relaxing both types of the

brains membranes tighten and again this is how one is able to recognize when craving arises then they practice the 6R's and let go of the craving at that time. Whenever anyone lets go of the tension or tightness in their mind and body they will begin to notice a quiet space where mind is exceptionally alert and there is no disturbance at all. Mind at that time is clear, alert and very tranquil and they bring that mind back to the meditation object again, which is the breath and relaxing on the in breath and relaxing on the out breath.

Now everytime mind becomes distracted by anything - there is contact (with one of the sense objects that is eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind), next arises a feeling and then right on its heels the craving arises. If the meditator is alert enough they will notice a feeling arise and relax right at that moment, then the craving, clinging, and habitual tendencies will not arise. But if the meditator's mindfulness (observation) is not strong enough or alert enough then the craving (tightness or tension), the clinging (the story about) and the false belief in a personal self arises, next the old habitual tendencies of treating that story and self belief, like always arises. The job of the meditator is to be able to recognize when a feeling arises and relax right then. And of course this is not an easy thing to do, and almost impossible for people who are just starting out in meditation.. But and this is a Big but, when the meditator follows the simple instructions given to us by the Buddha about relaxing both mind and body on the in breath and the out breath, one's progress in meditation will improve until one goes by stages through the jhanas. Jhanas are stages of understanding that is gained by the meditator as they begin to see exactly how this whole process actually occurs.

This whole process actually needs to be a joyful experience because that is the way to deeply understand how the true nature of all existence occurs. The fun one has in exploring the faster they will learn and see how each of us causes the suffering to arise in ourselves. With the smile we can recognize when mind becomes heavy and full of unwholesome states like sadness, grumpiness, anger, dissatisfaction, depression, fear, anxiety or whatever the catch of the day is! When we learn to smile and have fun with whatever arises in the present moment then we are able to progress quickly.

I hope this has been of some help to everyone! Hahaha! Whew!

Maha-Metta 2U
always
Bhante Vimalaramsi

